# THE AAS ETHICS CODE



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## **Summary**

- American Astronomical Society has had policies in place since 2008 to deal with harassment at society events.
- Grassroots activities by AAS members and others in the community have been important in tackling these issues and pushing the society to revise policies and procedures.
- Sexual Harassment is only one symptom of unethical behavior that keeps women and under-represented groups from fully participating in STEM.
- AAS cannot alone remedy ethical concerns in astronomy.
- There is an on-going, holistic discussion in astronomy.
- Changes are needed to insure ethical standards are backed up by enforced policies, procedures, and consequences for breeches.



# Anti-Harassment Policy at meetings (2008) https://aas.org/policies/anti-harassment-policy

 It is the policy of the American Astronomical Society (AAS) that all participants in Society activities will enjoy an environment free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. As a professional society, the AAS is committed to providing an atmosphere that encourages the free expression and exchange of scientific ideas. In pursuit of that ideal, the AAS is dedicated to the philosophy of equality of opportunity and treatment for all members, regardless of gender, gender identity or expression, race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion or religious belief, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities, veteran status, or any other reason not related to scientific merit. Harassment, sexual or otherwise, is a form of misconduct that undermines the integrity of Society meetings. Violators of this policy will be subject to discipline.



# Ethics Statement (2010) //aas.org/about/policies/aas-ethics-statement

The AAS believes that the following are the minimal standards of ethical behavior relating to the profession.

**Conduct Towards Others** - All people encountered in one's professional life should be treated with respect. At no time is abusive behavior acceptable.

Research - Data & research results should be recorded and maintained for review, analysis, and reproduction; Fabrication or selective reporting of data with the intent to mislead or deceive is unethical

Publication and Authorship Practices - Proper acknowledgement and/or authorship should always be given; Plagiarism is unethical behavior and is never acceptable.

Peer Review - Peer review can serve its intended function only if thorough, fair, and objective evaluations based on requisite expertise is provided.

Conflicts of Interest - Conflicts of interest should be fully disclosed.



# Grassroots initiatives: Astronomy Allies, Women in Astronomy Blog Series

www.astronomyallies.com/Astronomy\_Allies/Welcome.html



2014

womeninastronomy.blogspot.com/

# Women In Astronomy

SPECIAL EDITION: Fed Up with Sexual Harassment



# Motivation for Revision of the AAS Ethics Code https://aas.org/ethics

- This AAS Code of Ethics is presented as a set of guidelines and best practices for professional behavior. In order to promote and uphold these guidelines and best practices, they must be communicated to the membership and to others interacting with the astronomy community.
- However, these guidelines hold no authority or meaning if they are breached without consequence.
- As the elected board of the AAS, the Council has a responsibility to inform the community of stakeholders what membership in the society means.
  - Excerpts from the AAS Ethics Code Preamble



#### **Revised Ethics Code**

The revised AAS Ethics Code closely follows the topics included in the 2010 Ethics Statement with several notable additions and changes.

- 1. Preamble to the code added to manage expectations of both those who think the code goes too far and those who think it doesn't go far enough
- 2. Updated 'Conduct Toward Others' section that explicitly includes harassment, sexual harassment and bullying
- Added section on how concerns of ethical breaches of the code will be handled by the AAS



### **Enforcing the AAS Ethics Code: Work in progress**

- Renewing or joining members are required to acknowledge and abide by ethics code with understanding that any breach could result in sanctions up to and including removal of member status.
- When registering for AAS and Division meetings, each registrant (including guests and exhibitors) is required to acknowledge that they have read and will abide by the AAS code of ethics as well as the AAS anti-harassment policy for meetings.
- Code of Ethics Committee (CoEC) being formed
- The Examiner, an appropriately credentialed employee of a professional organization under contract to the AAS to investigate complaints, has been contracted.
- The AAS Code of Ethics (both policy and procedures) should be reviewed regularly for updates, revisions and/or modifications.



### **Preamble Highlights**

- The meaning of and adherence to the guidelines for responsible scientific, educational and research conduct and best practices in any code of ethics will likely continue to be debated among community members.
- Each astronomy community stakeholder (e.g., universities, research institutions, funding agencies, collaborations, individuals, etc.) bears responsibility for upholding a set of common scientific, educational and ethical standards and assigning consequences when these standards are breached.
- The AAS is only one of these stakeholders. In many cases of ethical breach, the AAS is not the entity where primary jurisdiction for investigative or corrective measures resides.
- The AAS has neither the resources (e.g., personnel, expertise, funding, etc.), nor the oversight authority to accept the responsibility for investigating and adjudicating suspected breaches of ethics that are the rightful jurisdiction and responsibility of other community stakeholders.



#### **A Holistic Approach**

- Our scientific community must have ethical standards in place that are backed up by enforced policies, procedures, and consequences for breeching them.
- Sexual Harassment is a symptom of unethical behavior, assumed privilege, and power dynamics/imbalances in science culture.
- To combat sexual harassment, we must build an ethical community.
- A holistic approach to a more ethical community means practicing diversity, inclusion and equity as an ethical requirement of scientific education AND research.

# INCLUSIVE ASTRONOMY 2015



June 17 - 19, 2015, Vanderbilt University. 160 astronomers, sociologists, policy makers and community leaders convened to discuss intersectional barriers and solutions to success in astronomy.

**Removing Barriers to Access** 

**Creating Inclusive Climates** 

**Establishing a Community of Inclusive Practice** 

Policy, Power, and Leadership

Presentation videos, posters and toolkits: vu.edu/ia2015

Nashville Recommendations: AAS Wiki: https://tiki.aas.org/tiki-index.php? page=Inclusive Astronomy The Nashville Recommendations

Google doc: <a href="http://bit.ly/1JXIOzZ">http://bit.ly/1JXIOzZ</a>

http://www.cvent.com/events/women-in-astronomy-iv-the-many-faces-of-women-astronmers/event-summary-589214b84ab94f26ac269ad9823ef977.aspx





### End



### **Additional Slides and Details**



### Brief descriptions of topics included

#### **Conduct towards Others**

- All people encountered in ones professional life should be treated with respect
- Discriminatory treatment or harassment because of sex, race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity expression, other characteristics protected under applicable law violates the AAS code of ethics
- Bullying behavior that demeans, intimidates, humiliates or sabotages other's work is unacceptable

#### **Conduct in Research**

- Research misconduct, including plagiarism and the fabrication of data, violates the Code of Ethics
- Reviewers of manuscripts and funding proposals must proactively reveal any conflicts of interest
- Data and research results should be recorded and maintained in a form that allows review, analysis, and reproduction by others.
- Incumbent of researchers to make results available in a timely manner
- Fabrication, falsification or selective reporting of data with the intent to mislead is unethical, unacceptable and fraudulent, as in the appropriation of unpublished data or research results from others without permission & attribution.
- Errors that could be misleading should be promptly acknowledged & corrected.



### Brief descriptions of topics included

#### **Publication and Authorship Practices**

- Authors are expected to adhere to basic standards of professional ethics. Authors, editors and referees should be aware of professional and ethical standards adopted by AAS journals.
- All persons who have made significant contributions to a paper/talk should be offered the opportunity to be authors. People who have not contributed significantly should not be authors. Others who have contributed should be properly acknowledged.
- Sources of financial support should be acknowledged.
- Plagiarism is never acceptable.

#### **Peer Review**

- Provide thorough, fair and timely evaluations.
- Materials provided in confidence must not be used or disclosed by reviewers

#### Conflict of Interest

- Any professional relationship or action that may be, or may be perceived to be, a conflict of interest should be fully disclosed.
- Conflicts typically in three categories 1) affiliation of reviewer with applicant's institution; 2) relationship of panel member to proposer, including personal, professional, or business relations and 3) relationships or affiliations among panel members.

#### **List of Resources**



## **Community Feedback**

#### Very Rough stats on comments

	Generally	Generally	Generally	Hard to tell	Totals
	positive	negative (too much)	negative (too little)	(short comments)	
Named	10	3	2	5	20
Anonymous	3	8	1	6	18
Totals	13	11	3	11	38

- ♦ Numbers refer to submissions, not necessarily individuals. A few submissions were made by groups of people.
- Council comment numbers not included here.
- Verbally made comments to ETF not included here



#### Other Lessons Learned/Thoughts

- 1. Very few members knew that the AAS has had a Ethics Statement since 2010. Transparency and openness are important!
- 2. Sexual Harassment is NOT the only (ethical) issue that effects women, URM or others in Astronomy (and other sciences).
- 3. Strong control of the policy and process by AAS President and Council (e.g., appointment of COE, not elected)
- 4. Push back comes from both sides: Too much reform and too little reform
- 5. Many of the most adamant supporters of the implementation of procedures for handling ethical complaints came from White men.
- 6. Ultimately, the revisions made, setting standards and in handling complaints, WILL BE insufficient. There WILL BE cases where the 'right' thing to do is unclear given what is outlined in the code, e.g., Can observers of a violation be victims if the 'victim' denies a violation? Can a group exclude authorship by 'unethical' collaborators?
- 7. Legal ramifications are always a concern. (This is why many universities are not handling these issues themselves.)
- 8. All details for handling complaints are not outlined because of need to be flexible, so discretion is left to COE, President and Council (e.g.,no lists of standards for sanctions, requirements for acceptance of action by AAS and when to pass to other authority).



#### Recommendations cont.

- The AAS should strengthen opportunities to de-escalate potential conflicts through increased education of policies to members, training of staff and volunteers (e.g., CoEC members, session chairs, etc.). For example on basic mediation techniques, victim advocacy, etc.
- The AAS should keep an up-to-date, publicly available, on-line list of resources regarding all areas of concern covered in the AAS Code of Ethics.
- 6. The AAS Council should request that other astronomy stakeholders make their policies regarding ethical behavior available and recommend that stakeholders review their policies for updating and clarity.
- 7. The AAS Council should ask its journal editors and data archival institutions to review, and if necessary, revise or update their guidelines on ethical behavior.
- 8. The AAS Code of Ethics (both policy and procedures) should be reviewed regularly for updates, revisions and/or modifications.



#### **Ethics code revision timeline**

- Oct 2015 ETF appointed
- Nov 2015 2 week initial public comment period (named & anonymous)
- Dec 2015 Submission of initial draft (v1) from AAS Ethics Statement, codes of other societies, & initial public comments for Council review
- Jan 2016 Council comments on initial draft
- Feb 2016 New draft (v2) with Council comments for further review
- Mar 2016 Draft version (v3) release for 1 month community comment period (named and anonymous)
- May 2016 Recommendations and Draft with community (v4) comments to Council for review
- June 2016 Discussion of v4 at Council retreat session leads to v5
- June 2016 Council votes to 'accept' ETF recommendations and v5 with additional changes before implementation
- Post-June AAS meeting Council does minor rewrite of parts of code.
- Oct 2016 Executive Council votes to approve the revised Ethics Code
- Implementation of Ethics Code is Ongoing